Exercise One

In this short writing exercise, I'll relate the practical history of my project and fieldwork, tracing its arc from its origins in my prior research efforts through its development into its current form; I'll also discuss some of the theoretical and conceptual concerns that animated / were animated by my ethnographic activity, narrating my attempts to find and articulate a framework fit for the analysis of my findings in the field; and I'll finally indicate some of the further questions my research experience opened up both on the topic of my study and for my interests in a wider context. My intention is to offer some insight into how the unpredictable development of this ethnographic project changed my sensibilities as a researcher and as a thinker.

The roots of my thesis project can be traced back to my undergraduate degree at the University of King's College in Halifax. King's is a liberal arts university, historically modelled after the programs for the humanities at Oxford and Cambridge, where many of the founding scholars of King's took their degrees — indeed, for many years, it was a requirement to hold a degree from one of these institutions in order to teach at King's. The school still follows a 'great books' model of teaching which strives to orient its students within the context of a 'Western canon' of philosophy, literature, and the arts. Around the turn of the millennium, however, changing sensibilities at the school opened up the institution to alternative takes on this tradition. By the time I studied at King's, the school was characterized by an interest in continental philosophy, critical theory, and interventions into the canon from the 'margins' of intellectual history.

The three main programs offered at the school are the Early Modern Studies Program (mostly European art and philosophy from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment), the Contemporary Studies Program (continental philosophy post-Hegel), and the History of Science and Technology Program (anthropology and philosophy of science largely inspired by the French approach to science studies). I took my specialization in CSP, where I mostly focused on works of political theory from writers like Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler, as well as some psychoanalytic theory in the style of Jacques Lacan. Later in my degree, however, I gravitated towards working alongside my friends and colleagues in the HOST program, attracted in that direction by my strong appreciation for philosophers of science like Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, which lead to a growing interest in the new materialist philosophers who develop a Foucauldian style of critique and try to apply it to the lived environment of human life.

For my undergraduate thesis, I decided to perform a Latourian reading of *The Body Keeps the Score*, a popular science book by the psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk. This book, first published in 2015, still remained atop the pop science bestseller lists in 2021, when I began writing. The text presents a wide-ranging overview of a cluster of alternative theories of trauma and practices for treating traumatic stress, characterized by their de-emphasis of cognitive explanations in favour of more pluralistic body-oriented approaches. On campus and online, I noticed the strong interest readers of my generation were taking in the concept or category of trauma to characterize their experiences, especially in relation to a surging resistance to sexual violence and a new sensitivity to issues of addiction and social disenfranchisement. I was interested in using Latour's

analysis of science to both articulate the underlying philosophy of Van der Kolk's discussion of the body, and to understand why his attitude proved so salient for the times.

While I was broadly satisfied with the intellectual accomplishments of my undergraduate thesis, I felt a certain urge to develop these questions beyond a merely textual engagement. I also wanted to think about how to integrate a sensitivity to cultural difference into the study — while Van der Kolk's sensitivity to personal history is clear in the book, he dismisses the importance of cultural factors in the formulation and articulation of those trauma stories. I didn't know much about the proper discipline of anthropology at the time, but I was familiar with ethnography as a concept through the work of Latour, whose early career was oriented around the development of a program for performing ethnography of laboratory spaces. I thought that I might like to try to do some ethnography of somatic therapists, who still lack a widely recognized professional association, and who remain engaged in a contest to have their practices and theories of trauma recognized and validated by the mainstream medical and psychological research communities. I came to Concordia with this plan in mind: an ethnographic description of somatic therapy, which could speak both to the concrete environments of these new therapeutic spaces as well as the wider effort of this discipline to become a more authoritative kind of science.

Early on in my process of organizing fieldwork, I encountered some significant issues with this plan. First of all, because somatic therapy lacks major professional associations, the only real field sites to speak of would be the individual 'clinical' or therapeutic spaces where practitioners meet with their clients to engage in the therapeutic process. Obviously, inviting an anthropologist to observe these intimate settings was not something most therapists to whom I spoke were willing to consider. I myself was also reticent about the ethics of inserting myself into spaces where emotional vulnerability was raised to such a heightened degree. Another option was to try to participate in the various kinds of educational settings in which these therapists learn their trades, but these schools were suspicious about having an outside observer, and in any case were somewhat hostile to the idea of providing access to someone who hadn't paid course fees.

At this point, I decided to think about how to answer my research questions through the ethnographic study of some other scientific discipline and space. What I was really interested in was thinking through how it is that a given field develops and operationalizes a concept or plural concepts of the body in order to imagine and enact interventions against distress. Because I was committed to working out of Montreal, I found out about the discipline of transcultural psychiatry, of which McGill University is a globally important center. Transcultural psychiatry was interesting to me for a few reasons: first, although it is now broadly accepted by mainstream psychiatry, it did emerge as a somewhat alternative or critical form of medicine, and so its practitioners seemed sensitive to the same issues of validation relevant to somatic therapists; secondly, thinking through cultural difference is one of its core concepts; and thirdly, I thought it might be interesting to study as an anthropologist a medical field that is in many ways informed by past anthropological thinking and attitudes — and I also thought this historical relation between the two fields might make it easier for me to gain access to its clinical spaces.

I began contacting faculty members and McGill's Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, and quickly came into conversation with Dr. Laurence Kirmayer, the director of the division and the editor of the field's major research journal, *Transcultural Psychiatry*. He was interested in my work, and put me into contact with Dr. Eric Jarvis, the director of a Cultural Consultation Service operated by the Jewish General Hospital, designed to help other doctors with cases in which cultural difference proved to be an obstacle to effective care. With Dr. Jarvis, I negotiated my participation in these consultation sessions and gained access to this (virtual) paraclinical site, which is my first site of ethnographic field research.

Eventually, it became clear that I would need to add some supplementary sites to my project. First of all, the CCS only met online following the covid pandemic, and I wanted to do some in-person research, where I could deploy and refine some of the methods and sensitivities for environmental analysis that attracted me to ethnography in the first place. I got back in touch with Dr. Kirmayer, and asked if I could attend some of the seminars or workshops offered by the DSTP, both to get a sense of in-person fieldwork, and to get a sense of the educational milieus of transcultural psychiatry in addition to the clinical world I was beginning to understand. I negotiated access with Dr. Kirmayer to a three-day summer workshop at the DSTP titled, 'Culture, Mind, and Brain,' which was designed to articulate the conceptual bases of transcultural psychiatry and to introduce the ongoing entanglement of this medical discipline with the neurological research program that still dominates the mainstream psychiatric literature.

The workshop was an intensely fruitful experience both personally and academically. I found the approach of Dr. Kirmayer and the colleagues he invited to the cultural dimensions of cognition, life in general, and the professional science of the brain to be fascinating. Here was a way of approaching the 'harder' sciences of the mind with a sensitivity to cultural difference and lived experience. I was intrigued by the ecological metaphors or environmental models that these transcultural psychiatrists used to explain how microactors like synapses or stress hormones could be lucidly linked to macroactors like cultural pressures or social structures. The workshop also proved a useful networking opportunity: there I met Dr. Robert-Paul Juster, the director of the 'Centre d'etudes sur le sexe*genre, l'allostasie, et la resilience' (CESAR), where he oversaw various studies regarding the relation between sexuality and stress hormones.

Although I was not particularly interested in issues of sex and gender in the context of my research program, I was curious about how scientists might treat this social phenomenon in the context of biological research, given the difficult history of the relation of psychiatry and medicine with the Queer community. More so, however, I was also just interested in getting into a laboratory and doing some of the 'dirty work' of science that Latour built his early research program around — in fact, his first ever effort in laboratory ethnography involved fieldwork at a laboratory where the object of study was hormonal mediators of stress. Dr. Juster was a generous and excited informant, and invited me to come do participant observation at the CESAR.

This field site proved to be my main site of ethnography, both because of its hands-on nature and the generosity of Dr. Juster in opening doors for me. While at first I found his keen interest in my

project to be a bit confusing (though certainly not unwelcome), I realized that it was in some ways a quid pro quo relationship. Dr. Juster is still a young academic, and the world of clinical psychological research is intensely competitive. To have a social scientist (albeit one in training) produce a literary document about his laboratory must have been an enticing possibility to him, just as much as it was exciting for me to have access to a well-funded training laboratory with multiple high-technology bioassays on site.

Over the course of the next four months, I went to CESAR twice a week, both to participate in the laboratory activities (to help the small team launch and carry out a new project called the 'Stress and Resilience Study'), and also to take notes on their methods of working with each other, their research goals and styles, and the overall environment of the lab. My main priority was to get integrated as a 'normal' member of the laboratory team and to try to understand how these young scientists thought their work might contribute to a deeper understanding of the body in general and of queer bodies in specific.

I began this ethnographic process with only one very clear orienting conceptual theory, which was Bruno Latour's early-career account of how scientists construct facts — this theory of fact, text, and machine production grows directly out of his research program for how to do laboratory ethnography. I had a strong interest in his later, more philosophical or ontological work on the human-nonhuman divide, but I wasn't sure at first if these were the terms I wanted to use to build out my analysis of the body. As my research continued, however, this frame became more and more relevant, and I continued to study that branch of Latour's thinking. This ongoing study significantly informed the direction of my ethnographic attention. As I grew more interested in this conceptual system, which seemed to clarify or provide a deeper language for the activities at the lab, I began to ask questions that elicited responses in styles more and more proximate to Latour's thinking. This curious circularity — which looks not unlike a process of confirmation bias or a chain of 'leading questions' — is one of the main features of an ethnographic inquiry or gaze which is already theory-laden.

The other conceptual trajectory my field work kicked me off into was a more thoughtful attention to the ethical dimensions of public health. A few months into my ethnography, I happened to pick up a copy of Didier Fassin's *Les mondes de la santé publique* at Libraire Drawn & Quarterly on Bernard street. I was curious to read anthropology in French — at that point, my capabilities in French had just reached the level to allow me to read more serious works of non-fiction — and I quickly found that Fassin deployed a kind of anthropological gaze that brought the ethical dangers and promises of public medicine into sharp relief. One of the most common critiques of Latour's work in general is its ethical mutedness — he is simply not a very explicitly politically charged thinker. While I in some ways appreciated this element of his scholarly comportment, I found Fassin's attention to precarious life to be inspiring and motivating.

In the rest of my ethnography, but also in the way I continued to move through the world in general, I tried to incorporate these new conceptual attitudes: an interest in a new ontology of agency, a commitment to ecological or environmental sensitivity, and an ethical curiosity.

In-Class Exercise

Audience 1. Marc.

My project aims to describe the field of transcultural psychiatry in Montreal along three axes: its educational settings, especially at the Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry at McGill University; its clinical space, specifically the Cultural Consultation Service of the Jewish General Hospital; and its research or laboratory environments, namely the Centre d'études sur le sexe*genre, l'allostasie, et la résilience at the Hôpital Louis H. Lafontaine. My description of this field of medical science will involve analysis of its textual products (such as scientific papers, clinical protocols, and research data) as well as ethnographic fieldwork (including both interviews and participant observation). Of special interest for my research are the somatic dimensions of transcultural psychiatry: I aim to understand how this field affords new or diverse interpretations of the body as an object of research, as a locus for psychiatric symptoms, and as a site for medical interventions. In articulating the kinds of facts or sensibilities that this field generates in relation to the body — both for its practitioners and for its patients — I aim to situate transcultural psychiatry in relation to emerging notions of culturally-diverse embodiment and the relationship between body and environment across disciplinary boundaries.

Audience 2. Carole.

Hi Mom. So, my project is part of a field called science studies, or the anthropology of science. In this field, we try to answer questions about how scientists work — where facts come from and how they're constructed in labs, why scientists choose to research the things that they do, and all the different factors that influence the direction of a field of science or of science in general. In the practice of anthropology, we use a method called ethnography: this research method is based on the principle that you can understand a lot about a specific cultural group by just going to spend time with them, by trying to participate in their activities, and by asking people to tell their own stories about what they think they're doing. I wanted to get a better understanding of a field of medicine called transcultural psychiatry — it's a fairly new discipline in psychiatric science which tries to figure out how cultural difference impacts the experience and presentation of mental illnesses. I was especially interested to think about how transcultural psychiatrists think about or use the body to build out their specific approach to psychiatry. It's interesting, right? We all have the same body — this is like the basic principle of medical research, after all — but if culture effects our mental health, and mental illness always has a physical element, then maybe cultural difference has a big impact on how we inhabit and live through our bodies… So, I went and spent some time at places of transcultural psychiatry, to see what they're getting up to.

Exercise Two

The writing exercise that follows is an attempt at a thick description of an ordinary working day at one of my field sites, the CESAR laboratory at the Hôpital L. H. Lafontaine in East Montreal. For some brief preliminary context, I was involved with the CESAR lab at the invitation of its director, Dr. Juster, as an anthropologist-in-residence on the Stress and Resilience Study (STARS). The STARS project was designed in early 2023 by Dr. Rob Juster and some of his graduate students; when I joined the lab in fall 2023, the study was entering its pilot phase and beginning to welcome its first participants to the laboratory setting. During this period, much of our attention as the research team was dedicated to working out practical kinks in the operationalization of the research design, and to an effort to improve our functional efficiency.

This was a more or less typical clinical psychiatry research project: it involved soliciting participants to come to the lab, where they would provide life-history and biometric information through standardized questionnaires, be subjected to a social stress test (a kind of controlled social experiment designed to induce a physiological stress response), and provide biological samples (saliva, blood, and stool) for later chemical analysis. The guiding 'paradigm' of the STARS project and of the CESAR laboratory more broadly is the *allostatic model* of physiological and psychological stress. The allostatic model, simply put, proposes a new explanation for the stress systems of the body: it advances a different hypothesis about the rhythm of the production of stress hormones, bearing implications for the nature and development of chronic stress.

At CESAR, researchers apply this model of chronic stress to the study of populations known to experience social marginalization on the basis of their gender or sexuality. It is a well-established epidemiological fact (almost taken for granted by now) that discrimination leads to elevated stress patterns; CESAR studies seek to use the principles of the allostatic model to determine whether and to what extent this differential phenomenon holds for their population of interest.

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I arrive at the lab at 10:45am on the morning of October 26, walking the already-familiar path from Radisson station under a grey and moody sky. I'm not in a good mood and coming into the fluorescence of the students' work room, the space does not feel as warm and convivial as it did last week. I'm not sure where the SexCog people are, it's just Nevena and Ryan — they're both at their computers, facing away from each other. I can tell Nevena is stressed out, she's biting her fingernails well past the point of tactfulness and doesn't give her customary excited 'hello'. The FRQ deadline is approaching and I know she doesn't feel good about her proposal.

I set my stuff down and chat a bit with Ryan, but he's also a bit distracted; it's clear he wants to focus on work today — Gaia, the old project coordinator, has been on a mental health leave for two weeks now, and it's clear to us that Ryan, her replacement, has a pretty big mess to clean up. Jasmine, the resident nurse on the STARS project, comes in from one of the experiment rooms

— she's just finished a blood draw. Her and Ryan start discussing how to prioritize the tasks for the day, and what we need to ask Rob's help over in the meeting, Nevena turns away from her laptop to listen in. Jasmine asks her how the work is going and Nevena waves off the question.

There are some scheduling issues with the second visits (V2s), we're having trouble getting people back to the lab to deliver the biological samples they're supposed to have done at home. Jasmine also wants us to do some editing work on the Qualtrics (the standard questionnaires), pointing out a few redundancies. Ryan mentions that he's noticed some inconsistencies between the French and English versions. Ines, another research member, arrives to the lab and the group begins dividing the work — there is a clear sensitivity to how much Ryan has on his plate, and the group discusses how to keep tasks balanced.

Following this, we have a brief discussion on preparing an agenda for the upcoming meeting with Rob. Ryan mentions the compliance issue, where participants are returning to the lab without having properly filled out the sampling journals to show their adherence to protocol; Ines suggests we reintroduce the MEMScap device (a container that records when its lid has been opened and closed) — this would allow us to see when participants accessed the sampling apparatus. Next, Ines mentions the possible addition of an inventory on sexuality and libido to the Qualtrics questionnaire; Ryan expresses his support for this proposal, on the basis of his sense that sexual experience is such an important part of Queer sociality in general. Finally, Ryan reminds the group that Rob will be in LA at the beginning of November, so that this will be our last chance to meet with him for a while.

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There are a few themes I'd like to draw out of this fifteen minutes of lab work leading up to a project meeting, indicating some of the orienting concerns or interests of the research team at the early stage of a long-term study. These concerns can be interpreted through their alignment with some of the core claims Latour makes about the activity of science — there are surely other ways to interpret them as well. For Latour, science is essentially a literary enterprise: every stage of laboratory work is organized around the generation of ***inscriptions*** and the arrangement of those inscribed pieces of information into some kind of literary document (the prototypical one being the scientific paper). The effect of well-organized information — and, in a more cynical Latourian reading of science, the whole point of this activity — is the generation or capture of ***social credit*** for the laboratory and its directors. Better information (in which the data is less contestable, and more interesting) creates better credit (the lab gets more funding, other scientists shift from contesting its authority to aligning themselves with it).

Nevena, a young scientific researcher, attempts to translate her work at the lab into an appeal for credit from the provincial granting agency. She often consults the older researchers for advice on how to make her contribution to the production of scientific information more undeniably valuable. Without that credit (in the form of the grant money and the authority it attributes), there will be no production of information, and no more science, for Nevena.

Meanwhile, as a group, we are thinking through how to make our information itself more undeniable. We know that there is a potential gap in the network we have designed to secure the transformation of biological material into scientific information. When our participants leave the lab, we can no longer reliably speak for them; or rather, we can no longer use the information produced by their bodies to speak to our account of stress, to the model for which we are trying to build credibility. Outside of this laboratory network, the data loses its stability, so to speak, and so we cannot rely on it to circulate through a critical scientific readership unscathed. Our job becomes to extend the network of the laboratory by enlisting an ally that can ensure the stability of the information: in this case, the best ally is a technological device that can replicate the watchful conditions of the experiment rooms down the hall. In our conversations, it is never made explicit whether our effort to extend and stabilize the trajectory of credible information comes from an authentic desire for scientific knowledge, or from an anxiety about attacks from other scientists, proponents of alternative propositions who are protective of their own credit.

Now, scientific credit may not be a zero-sum game, but competition is still the rule when grant money is limited. Rob's trip to Los Angeles is an example of the way in which laboratory spaces depend on social networks for support: as the director, an important part of Rob's job is to travel to conferences in order to garner support for the allostatic model and for Queer science. These conferences allow scientists to take the temperature about trends in the credit-distribution of a given field, to make alliances with researchers at other centers of credit-allocation (in the form of collaborative projects, the transit of guest lecturers, shared resources, and general social support), and to advocate for the value of the kind of information they generate at their own laboratories.

Finally, the discussion of the sexuality questionnaire speaks to this question: what kind of information are we generating at the CESAR? An implicit part of the scientific process is the generation of new kinds of objects, which afford different kinds of information. In the early twentieth century, Hungarian-Canadian researcher Hans Selye's Montreal laboratory gave birth to a 'toxic agent' theory of stress; a century later, his hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis system constitutes one of the most prominent research programs in all of biological science; researchers vie to get a piece of the credit attached to this one complex of 'objects' or agents. CESAR relies on established (***black-boxed***) objects of this science, such as hormonal mediators (cortisol, the catecholamines, fibrinogen), within the paradigm of an emerging rearticulation of stress theory (the allostatic model) to speak to the existence of a new kind of object for research: the Queer body. The point of our work on this study is to generate information that defines the distinctive existence (perhaps historically contingent but nonetheless real) of Queerness as a condition that is or can be linked to the reality of those creditable and credible agents in the story of stress.

Though it is not stated outright in the official program of the STARS project (which frames the endeavour as a descriptive one, meant primarily to establish correlative facts), it is not difficult to imagine how such a fact — 'Queer bodies are differentially exposed to stress, and we have the chemical data to prove it, the hormones can't lie' — might lend itself to being leveraged in critical political efforts to interrogate the felt social realities to which these ostensibly unfeeling and impersonal chemical entities are by now intractably linked in the field of clinical psychiatry.

Exercise Three

In many ways the story of my fieldwork hinges around a three-day workshop in the high heat of last summer, way up the mountain in the fluorescence of a nondescript classroom in McGill's Irving Ludmer psychiatry research building. Outside the window the trees pushed in towards us in their subtle green aggression. There was coffee and snacks. The title of the seminar-style series of talks was 'Culture, Mind, and Brain' — meant as an introduction to the intersections of neuroscience and transcultural psychiatry, it had gathered an attendance of interdisciplinary students and researchers, most of us firmly on the soft side of this new approach to the human sciences. I had just returned from a month in Europe, mostly staying with friends in Berlin and with my cousin and her almost-fiancé in Athens, and I was fully miserable. In the shimmer of that early July heat I was approaching the anniversary of the dissolution of a long and serious relationship with *her* and I was still very indulgent in the melodrama of it all. That year I had been learning all about independent life, while watching the well-defined hopes and dreams that I had hitched to our wagon rattle off into the distance and disappear over cliffs which suddenly appeared much more nearby than I had happened to imagine. My research project, which we had developed together and alongside the themes of her work in comparative literature, was then a carefully-detested reminder of just how much time does not consent to move in reverse.

I wanted to disown the project, to abandon and disavow it and add it to what then seemed to be a growing wreckage of all the past things I used to believe in — its future, like mine more broadly, did not seem worth imagining. Many philosophers of science claim that highly unique situated perspectives empower highly unique and thus especially valuable insights; my experience at the Ludmer building was adroitly teaching me that the epistemic situation of that heartbrokenness which lingers on past its welcome is ambivalently valuable at best. I wasn't sleeping well — I would show up bleary-eyed and half doze through the morning sessions. The friendly advances of my peers were met with an affect I can only really describe as a kind of misanthropic flair for the insolent. My notes were sloppy and are now hard to follow. I wanted to escape, in no particular order, that room, my body, and the trajectory of my life. It's funny now; it was not then. And yet, as the speakers droned on — about the somatization of depression in China, about the positive connotations of 'hearing voices' elsewhere, about the role of meditation and psychedelics in the new psychiatry — something genuinely unpredictable (or, at least, unpredicted by me) began to happen: I started to get interested in something. Here I was, steeped in the powerful concoction of my own distress, and being presented with all so many different approaches to the fact of distress — the different ways to feel it, to think it, and to respond to it.

Psychiatry is a fraught discipline. It has not often done a great job with taking care of people in distress; sometimes it has gone against all conceivable reason. Down the road from where we were learning, the psychiatry department at McGill had conducted psychedelic experiments without consent under the rubric of the infamous MKULTRA project; the building next door was embroiled in an investigation into possible unmarked graves of Indigenous women at the scene of the crimes. Psychiatry has addressed people who can't control their feelings as a problem for society — they are often treated with cruelty; they often find other treatments which force them

into criminalization or into the shame of dependence. I have not always been able to take care of myself; my own family knows all too well what can happen to people who aren't able to find the help they need in untying their knots. What I felt at the CMB workshop was an earnest, bright-eyed, and careful effort to transform distress into what Bruno Latour calls 'a matter of concern' — polyvalent, plurivocal, transdisciplinary: an object that accrues reality through the multiplication of the perspectives trying to figure it out, trying to make it matter, trying to make it concerning. I came to find that this discipline I had proposed to research was not just interesting because it was, like any given emerging scientific field, rocked by trials of attribution and battles for credit. That week, it became interesting to me because of what its members wanted to do, and believed they could do: reach out across difference in the gesture of care.

When we think about our positionality as researchers, the first register we operate on is often *demographic*. I am white, I grew up upper class; I'm bisexual in a milieu where, socially speaking, it feels better to be my kind of queer than to be square; I'm quite happily comfortable in clothing from the boys' section (or at least content to save my little experiments for halls different than those of the academy); I speak a standard English, I think I remind some people of their dad (maybe it's my choice in deodorant) and that seems to send me a long way. This kind of reflexivity is, it's obvious to those who have eyes to see, very important. What I learned at the CMB workshop is the importance of a *biographic* positionality: what brought me to the study of those who study distress, people in crisis, migrants who cannot recover a sense of home in a strange and cold place like Montreal? What made this field so urgently interesting to me that I decided to devote two years of my life (it's not a small fraction, I'm a young person) to its description? What was I trying to learn about myself through an attention to the efforts of others? Confronting and discovering how to ask and answer these questions was an incredibly generative and liberating experience. I'm grateful to that nondescript room for bringing it to my articulation.

Exercise Four

Dramatis Personae

The Patient AKA The Subject AKA The Client AKA Her
Us AKA The Team
John, the Occupational Therapist
Her Friends
Her Family
Her God AKA Her Religion
Her Pills AKA SSRIs
The Siv Team (Soutien d'intensité variable)
The MAC Team (Mood and Anxiety Clinic)
Food
The Case Report
The Cultural Formulation Protocol
The Service Request
Some Old Master's Thesis on Filipino Culture
Four Filipino Cultural Concepts
Sleep Problems AKA Guilt AKA Burnout AKA Major Depressive Disorder
The Possibility of Going Home
Gentleness
Confidence

Ordo Rerum

1. Eric's Summary of what we do
2. Discussion of the Cultural Formation Interview
3. Presentation of the Cultural Formation
4. Discussion of the Case Report
5. Discussion of what to do next

The Vignette

It is December 15 and this will be our last meeting of the year. Things have been really intense at the CCS lately, our last few cases have been people in really heightened states of distress, dealing with really complicated trauma histories, and embroiled in all the madness and precarity of the final stages of their asylum claims; for them, there is almost no solid ground to stand on, the threat of deportation is very real, and they are haunted with increasing intensity by the possibility of having to return to the place they have spent years of their lives fleeing and trying to forget.

So we are all pretty relieved, it seems, when Eric presents the details of our case for this afternoon. She is a permanent resident of Canada, she's established a stable career here as a nurse, she does not present with any severe or extremely pronounced psychiatric condition. She's depressed. She's unhappy — it's normal. She isn't sleeping well. She feels guilty about

something. Probably, she will be better soon, though a “turbulent recovery period” would not be surprising. We’re pretty sure she’s coming back to life. So what happened? What’s the story?

Eric starts, as he usually does, with some facts. She’s a middle-aged woman, an immigrant from the Philippines. She doesn’t have that many friends here — the most important relationships in her life are to her family. Most of them are back home, she has an uncle in Longueuil who, it seems, is a bit of a dick. She’s the eldest grandchild — where she’s from, this means that she has a very clear role in the family life. She’s the peacemaker, she is to solve problems and show the way. She came to Canada and has sent a lot of money home. Hers has been a success story.

Things changed with the pandemic. Her village was hit very hard, they called it “the plague”. She wasn’t able to go home; she wasn’t able to help her people. And she could have — she’s a nurse, she would have known what to do. But if she had left, they wouldn’t have let her come back. She would have lost her job. So she had to stay, while she had to leave. And she hasn’t quite been able to find her way out of that paradox yet. A lot of her people died in the pandemic, and now she carries them around. It’s too heavy. She’s on leave from work. How do we help?

In these kinds of situations, the hybridity of the transcultural approach to psychiatry really shines quite clearly. What are our tools? Pills, yes. We review her dosage, we consider alternatives. God, yes. We discuss her relationship to the Filipino Catholic church in Montreal. We know about her charismatic pastor. Culture, yes. We understand *kapwa*, *utan ing lo*, *kia*, and *pa ki ka sama*. We see how these norms press her up against sharp internal edges. Food, sure. John and she made a traditional meal last month — it seemed to brighten her. And what else can we do?

We can work the network. Eric knows that the Siv team won’t work with the MDD diagnosis, so we might want to revise her file — besides, the “depression is breaking up” already. The MAC team has a long wait list, but Grace might be able to grease some hinges. John is at the CLSC, and his mandate is to get her back to work. The ‘service request’ is almost complete. So, we need to find a way to close the looming gap in care. We want to keep her in sight. But we’re pretty confident about this one. She has mobility, for her it is possible to go home. We think it might be possible for her to bring home back here. A little water, a little sunlight, a little mercy.

Exercise Five

I was excited about the opportunity to think and write about the field site as a 'situation' because this is in some ways an important motif or conceptual theme in my research. The title I've had in mind for the thesis project is 'Situating Stress' — there is a bit going on behind the curtains in that title, so I'll take the chance to unpack it a bit here, since I might not end up doing so in the text itself. By so doing, I hope to clarify the ways I try to approach the situatedness of the field.

In much of my writing or my creative work, especially what goes on outside the academy, I am for some reason drawn to a practice of citational poetics. This is the form or genre — brought to a new level of mastery by authors like Anne Carson but ultimately at least as old as the Talmud — of writing through, with, and around words and phrases already put together by others. You might also see this kind of practice referred to as 'glossing' in poetry translation (Coleman Barks' take on this in his translation of Rumi is excellent), 'riffing' in jazz, or 'biting' in rap. Nicky Taylor is a very good citational poet in the Montreal scene. Some authors are fastidious in their use of footnotes to demonstrate the source of the quote or idea; I prefer to smuggle these allusions into my own writing like unmarked easter eggs, there as a little gift or surprise for the readers lucky enough to 'get it'. Every generation has its art form — I am almost ready to argue that referentiality, although somehow without form itself, could be it for us internet babies.

You might be critical of this approach to citational poetics for (at least) either of two reasons: first of all, it's not so distant from a kind of plagiarism, where I'm making off like a literary marauder snatching and grabbing pith without stopping to say thanks — stolen valour; second, it's a bit pretentious. This is who I am — or it's just how I write anyways, and at this point it feels bad to try to stop myself. I will keep taking and remixing these lines from other writers, steady in the conviction that the remix is what art is all about. And if you put stock in the really great American novelist Richard Powers' view of things, then this kind of remixing, repurposing, and redeploying is what life is all about too — the basic structure to the mutational engine of evolution. So, if I were to cite everyone involved in my process of text-production, I would have to start with Ms. Dittenhoffer (she taught me how to read), include Virginia Woolf (just read the short essay "Words Fail Me"), and end up with oak trees and *homo erectus*. Clearly, it's ungainly.

The title 'Situating Stress,' for its part, comes from two places — both as an evolution of the title of my undergraduate thesis. The first and clearer source is Donna Haraway's 'Situated Knowledges' essay, which is one of the best rearticulations of standpoint feminism in the context of science studies. For Haraway, knowledge comes from situation — from being situated, from the strangely paradoxical limitedness of our inner experience which still "may approach infinity." It is in our ability to see things clearly from where we happen to stand, which Fernando Pessoa describes as 'our wealth', that we can make our claim to knowing something.

Knowledges overlap, condense, diverge, and multiply as more perspectives come into focus. Stability may be achieved through conversation; it would be difficult to find in the caricaturish solitude of the philosopher. When I was first developing this project, I wanted to reflect on this

situatedness of experience in its somatic dimensions: how do we each have our own style or way of being in the body and knowing about it? We are all stressed, but our stresses might be uniquely situated — particular to our culture, personal history, microfloral inheritance, et cetera.

I was interested in this question as a way to expand the 'somatic turn' of therapeutic thinkers like Bessel van der Kolk, who argues that traumatic stress can be approached primarily as an embodied phenomenon — not just cognitive, but visceral: located in the throat and chest as much as in the shattered symbolic universe of the mind. At first, I shifted from the adjective 'Situated' to the participle 'Situating' as one of these nods to the title of my prior thesis, which was 'Finding the Missing Masses.' This older project was an attempt to read Van der Kolk's major work, *The Body Keeps the Score*, through the lens of Latour's ontological turn, which he articulates as clearly as anywhere in the article "Where are the Missing Masses?" That article's title suggests his argument about creating a 'symmetrical anthropology', which balances the accounts of social theory by including the agency and gravity of nonhuman entities and physical structures. I thought Van der Kolk's argument for bringing the physical systems of the body into the accounting of traumatic stress as a kind of mental disorder might work as a good example of this effort towards symmetry, an attempt to find some missing mass.

So, in this project, 'situating stress' first meant my attempt to simply articulate the role and function of embodied stress in the accounting styles of transcultural psychiatry — to situate it as a concept in that discipline's theoretical terrain. As it turned out, the transcultural psychiatric concept of stress was already 'situated' — already articulated along the lines of Haraway's argument for particularity and partiality. I mean that I increasingly came to see the work of these people as an effort to 'situate' stress within their highly symmetrical (sociophysical, natural-cultural, psychosomatic) practice of medicine. In the same breath, consulting physicians would describe a patient's history and trajectory in terms of internal medicine, spiritual welfare, pharmaceutical regime, family system, sexual orientation, and subconscious affect. For them, the 'situation' or the 'situatedness' of the body can only be approached by following the converging lines of all these composite elements. Their 'field site' as (material) cultural analysts are these heterogenous bodies — Queer bodies, migrant bodies, bodies of mothers, bodies of survivors — and the situations in which they find themselves. My field site is the sum or the shape of whatever paths you might trace as you try to follow them around on the angles of their inquiries.

Exercise Six

A short introduction: since in last week's piece I touched a little bit on my bibliographic inheritance and my style of engaging with (or ripping off) authors I've found influential, I wanted to take the opportunity in this piece to do something a bit different than a kind of annotated bibliography of all of the many writers and artists I try to follow in my own work. I had two ideas for directions in which I might take this instead — I've opted for the weirder one.

There is more to learning how to write than the writers who show us how to put things into words. But I'll start with a quotation anyways (or a paraphrase), of Susan Sontag, who says that the work of art is to modify consciousness and organize new modes of sensibility. If the task of learning how to be a writer has something to do with this effort to alter consciousness and play with sensibility, then a large part of my training has had not very much to do with books.

Since I was about twelve or thirteen years old, I've been a drug user. Sometimes it has been a problem, more often (but far from always) it has only felt like one (there is a difference). Mostly I have loved them. At any rate, it's just a part of my life — if I were into gambling too, I'd bet it will always be with me (the fact of my use), even as the drugs I choose to use continue to change and continue to mean different things to the people with whom I live and come to writing.

There is a helpful ambivalence in our word 'drug' — which can mean both a cure (cancer drugs, for example), and a poison or a criminal substance (my drugs). The lines are obviously blurry. Good drugs follow one script: there is a doctor, controlled facilities, a little translucent orange bottle maybe. Bad drugs follow another: there is the dealer in his Honda, the drugs come from who even knows where, dime-sized ziploc bags. But both scripts involve a plan for feeling better.

There happens to be this same productive tension in the Greek *phármakon* (the etymological origin of our 'pharmacy') — on the one hand, a cure; on the other, a curse. In the minor cults of the Ancient Greek religions, there was a related word — *pharmakós.* Unlike the *phármakon*, which is some substance or spell, the *pharmakós* is a ritual, one which produces a kind of person. In the *pharmakós* ritual, a human scapegoat or victim is sacrificed or exiled from the community.

This ritual exile or death is performed at times of crisis, as a means of purifying the community of its pollution, its stain (the word sin is too ethereal, the word guilt is not quite dark enough). Slaves, cripples, or criminals, the *pharmakoi* are banished from the sight of the citizens who hope to live through the time of disaster; it's a social catharsis. I wonder what role the human exiles of our dirty drug/pharmacy complex serve, who, though not banished, are no longer seen.

But enough of that wordplay — let's get back to the origins of my sensibility (it's a nicer subject, anyways). I started using drugs for a few good reasons. First of all, I was bored. Time as a kid was flat, broad, and stretched longer out in front of me than I cared to see. I felt called to something different. Also, life sucked. I had no real mobility (of course), home was so bad, and it's a well-known paradox that witnesses to addiction are drawn like magnets to becoming users.

Call it following the example! Anyways, I guess I thought it was a pretty neat trick: to turn of all the lights of the house in your head, shut the curtains tight, and go somewhere else. So I went looking for the things I needed to undertake that mysterious and noble private project. But also, of course, it was just about the fun — skipping class, sitting in the sun, brightening to insane degrees the joy of a cheeseburger, laughing at clouds, feeling like a desperado, et cetera.

The first drug I figured out was weed (thanks Dashiell). Weed is an interesting one and is still an intimate companion of mine. What does it do for the sensibility? Well, first and foremost it is a relaxing: the thinner tendons of the chest and throat loosen, the heavy sternum settles and softens. Plants are not plants but instead 'various attempts at an architecture of catching light', the present moment opens up and becomes very spacious and welcoming, rules begin to smirk.

The drug that really started to open doors for me in important ways was psilocybin (we got it from the back room of that glass shop by Christie Pits park) — it's always felt silly to me to just call it mushrooms. They are a cool one because right away all the traps lose their dimensions, you can stretch the legs of the soul at last and shift around a bit: gender, any trace of self-loathing, anger at mom — on the good trips these problems are just opportunities to get creative.

My favourite drug, and the one that has caused the most trouble (I have to stay away from it now), is Xanax (it came from Harrison's spooky older brother). If mushrooms are about finding some agency in the face of any issues that have you bent out of shape, Xanax is about dissolving any worry, care, or concern in the world into water, hopping on a pool floaty, and gliding gently down the river as you finally feel free to tell everyone just how you feel about them. For a time.

I've also been into the party drugs (MDMA or Ketamine both work fine, thanks Ruby and Ines). These ones are a bit tricky because really, you're just taking out a loan against your future sense of put-togetherness in order to feel like an anime-princess-celebrity-glitter-businessman for four to six hours. But we always come back to them because they teach us that stress is just a feeling and that life is all about aesthetic combinations in the mind's eye while dancing sweatily.

I hope this doesn't seem too self-indulgent. My point, if I had to make one, is that it is not necessarily clear to me how to separate these parts of my life (the moments of profound relief, the darkest and most lost hours) out from my work as a writer of arguments. The world appears to me through these prisms; I understand the seriousness of theory only against the nonserious playfulness which drug use has taught me as a strategy for moving through the world, and the proud disrespect it has given me for all imaginary walls and too-demanding styles of behaviour.

Exercise Seven

Christine Jourdan's *Parlons Pijin*, the twenty-seventh installation of Michel Malherbe's *Parlons…* series for L'harmattan Press, offers a social and linguistic anthropology of the Pijin language of the Solomon Islands. The work in this text is to describe a language — not just in its technical dimensions (although an extensive and impressive lexicon and grammar makes up the second half of the book), but also through an intimate exploration of its people and its place. In this sense, the book can be thought of as a kind of ethnography in which the main character is not a person, but a way of speaking, figured or framed as a way of moving through the world. As Jourdan writes at the beginning of her second chapter, 'L'histoire social du Pijin':

> L'histoire d'une langue ne peut être pas dissociée de l'histoire des gens qui la parlent. L'histoire nourrit la langue : cette dernière en devient la dépositaire et la mémoire. Au cours de cette histoire, les rapports entre les cultures qui naissent et se développent et la langue qui leur sert de médium d'expression sont symbiotiques ; on ne sait des unes et des autres qui a la primauté ; on ne sait plus, de la langue ou de la culture, laquelle est le médium d'enracinement de l'autre. Et cela n'a pas d'importance (63).

This striking series of claims perhaps serves as the general philosophical thesis underlying Jourdan's research program and presentation; notably, for this anthropologist, the fundamental mysteries at the heart of the relation between social history and local language in no way compromise our ability to articulate authoritative information about the specific features of this relation as we find it, or to propose interesting and useful interpretations about how this relation informs (and is informed by) the cultural life of the people in question.

Jourdan begins her work in the introduction by briefly situating the Pijin language next to its cousins in the broad Melanesian-Polynesian archipelago, the closest and most instructive relative being the Tok Pisin language of Papua New Guinea. Both pidgins of English which serve as the national language for states with incredible linguistic diversity, the history of Pijin differs from Tok Pisin insofar as its elevation to national primacy and currency took place only as an effect of the urbanization process of the twentieth century in the Solomon Islands. In fact, if Pijin is the main ethnographic character of *Parlons Pijin*, then this urbanization process is the main ethnographic event — the historical shift around which the contemporary language is organized.

This is the case because, according to Jourdan, it is only in the urbanized Pijin of Honiara (the national capital) that strong norms and standards of speaking begin to emerge. This social effort towards normalization or regulation in the city transformed the character of Pijin from a highly and consciously informal *lingua franca* — which allowed members of the Islands' many linguistic groups to communicate to some degree with each other, but served as the first language of almost no Islanders — to a more universally legible national code, by their use of which different Islanders might be recognized and situated according to their social position.

In other words, the concrete process of urbanization that transformed Pijin also transformed, through this generation of a new form of the language, the way in which Solomon Islanders relate to their neighbours. Rural speakers of Pijin now betray themselves and their origins,

inadvertently or not, through their different ability to access and mobilize the urban syntax and style; older speakers participate in the language otherwise than younger speakers; and so the new Pijin becomes a way to trace and track the social history of the Islands and to help its speakers identify each other. In this sense, Pijin is both a tool for and an object of folk anthropology.

So, how does Jourdan go about telling this complicated story of a language? In the first chapter, she provides a broad and thoughtful social history and geography of the Solomon Islands cultures. This contextual background later functions as the basis of her interpretation or extrapolations about the meaning and effects of the urbanization process, so it merits a review.

The first section of the chapter, 'Un peu de géographie', begins with some basic cartographic work, describing the archipelago and the distinction on each island between coastal environment and the forests higher up in the mountains. Jourdan describes the ways in which the occasional natural disasters of the tropic climate punctuate the shared memory of the place, and describes the ways in which the natural beauties inform the manner of its inhabitants. Of special interest in this section is Jourdan's treatment of the mobility politics and infrastructures that regulate and afford travel between the national center and its peripheries, since, after all, mobility and migration plays such an important role in the ongoing evolution of Pijin.

In the next section, 'Un peu d'histoire', Jourdan reviews the colonial history of the Solomon Islands (no oral or recorded history of the precolonial times is discussed in detail). She describes the emergence of a trade economy with the different waves of outsiders, and the competing interests and counternetworks that began to significantly transform Islands life (through the introduction of new artifacts and technologies as much as through the introduction of a new social paradigm regarding trade and value).

Following these first colonial contacts, the major change of this era was the emergence of a second trade economy of working bodies, as sugar labour in neighbouring islands drew the Islanders out into a new migratory ecology of the Southern Pacific. Ultimately, the plantations of this off-Islands ecology would become the birthplace of Pijin — in order to allow the labourers to speak to each other and to their bosses — which was then imported back to the Solomon Islands as the cane-workers cycled through their temporary homes (or were displaced and deported when they tried to settle more permanently).

Glossing over the new forms of sociality which emerged in relation to 'the Whites' throughout the British colonial period and the American occupation of the Islands during WWII, the contemporary history of the Islands is marked mostly by a number of decolonial and postcolonial efforts to develop a coherent national identity. Pijin figures prominently in these political efforts — while it was denigrated and to a certain degree suppressed by the British, who placed it at the bottom of a linguistic hierarchy below the local vernaculars in the middle and English as an official and religious language at the top — the early political leaders of the Islands viewed Pijin as a way to generate and stabilize a shared social identity.

A final note on the history of the Islands concerns the ethnic conflict at the turn of the millenium, as the native inhabitants of the Island of Guadalcanal entered into a violent struggle to displace the political class of outsiders (mostly from the Island of Malaita) who had begun to settle in the capital city of Honiara on Guadalcanal's coast. In this instance, urbanization and the fraught concretization of a national political identity (in part through the increasing use of Pijin) became the engine of the most significant social event in the history of the country, which still leaves its lasting wounds in the economic prosperity and cultural imaginary of the young nation.

The short third section, 'Familles de langues et pratiques linguistiques', provides some of the richest anthropological insight of the text. In this section, Jourdan reviews the bright linguistic diversity of the Islands. The language units as she describes them traditionally correspond directly to the cultural-political units of the various villages (*hameaux*); as for these latter units, the ones found in the forests typically take the well-studied form of 'bigman' politics, while coastal villages more often function as hereditary chiefdoms.

The most fascinating sociolinguistic structure Jourdan describes in the section is a kind of chain of shared languages organized by *voisinage* across the archipelago, according to which any given person might speak their own language and that of their direct neighbours, such that translation and exchange is possible and in fact common between the geographic poles through an intricate series of intermediaries, though it would not be directly possible between the extremities. By describing this elegant linguistic bridge in such patient and indeed passionate detail, Jourdan sets the stage for a deeper interpretation of just what the disruptive/transformative urbanization process and subsequent spread of Pijin as a first language means for the Islands.

The remaining sections of the first chapter are dedicated to thorough and careful treatments of the national political and economic systems (including all of their local variations), an extensive overview of food systems (including the intricate division of labour according to gender and place), a rigorously materialist discussion of different architectural practices and the differences between the rural and urban domestic habitats, and finally a brief description of Honiara and its changing class and status structures. In all of these chapters, Jourdan interrupts and illuminates her more systematic descriptions with short ethnographic episodes, demonstrating the deep familiarity with the Islands' ways of life that her more general writing obviously suggests.

The second chapter, 'L'histoire sociale du Pijin', recapitulates the history of the Islands provided in the first chapter, but with a more focused eye on how this history informed the development of Pijin, as Islanders were forced or invited by historical processes to enter into networks of exchange, alliance, and resistance with other Islanders and (mostly white) outsiders. The attempt by the British to repress Pijin in favour of a bilingual model with English at the top and vernacular languages below is given special attention on this second pass.

The third chapter, 'Pijin, urbanisation, et pratiques linguistiques', finally brings this treatment of the language to completion. Relying on a number of illustrative ethnographic experiences with the various kinds of inhabitants of Honiara (each with their own social and linguistic history and

trajectory carefully examined and explained), Jourdan describes in detail the language games afforded by the proximity of so many different linguistic agents in one relatively small city.

It is in this chapter that she develops the major structural concepts of her text: Pijin as a means of social signalling or position; the 'Wantok' networks which trace and stabilize the contours of cultural diversity outside of the villages; the experimental linguistic practices of Honiara youth; the political efforts and social exigencies behind the legitimation and standardization of Pijin; the expanding affective dimensions of Pijin as it continues to be used as a means of self expression and artistic-cultural development; and finally the emergence of a new common form of urban bilingualism in which English and Pijin are prioritized at the expense of the vernacular languages which retreat deeper and further, like some threatened animal (the metaphor is readily suggested if perhaps ultimately irresponsible), into the forests of the archipelago.

One last note I'd like to make about this text regards its structure as a slightly unconventional work of ethnography — at least in comparison to many of the other texts we've read in class this year. As anthropology continues to reckon with its crisis of authority, it seems to me that many ethnographers have begun to shy away from the kind of deductive interpretation that now seems almost garish (or at least overly ambitious) in the works of Geertz or Levi-Strauss. This new style sees authors stick closer to the ethnographic material — longer quotes, less extrapolation is the responsible solution to the problem of over-generalization.

In some ways, this text responds to our apparent crisis by simply putting the horse back before the cart: instead of moving from ethnographic particulars to interpretive generals, Jourdan begins with a long and carefully-constructed history of Islands culture, only then moving deftly to short ethnographic examples when it is useful or required. This style may not be so rare, but *Parlons Pijin* is probably the best (and still somewhat recent) example I've been lucky enough to enjoy.

Exercise Eight

(I started approaching this exercise by thinking about Christine's book, and eventually a little write-up about that just came out. I've included it here because I think it's interesting, but I've marked where the beginning of my proper response to the specific prompt begins below.)

I want to respond to this exercise by first exploring a short illustrative example of how I think this kind of ethnographic storytelling can be so effective. I take the example from the monograph I reflected on last week, Christine Jourdan's *Parlons Pijin*, and I evaluate it on the basis of Didier Fassin's argument in favour of the "unique resources" and "vertical approaches" of anthropological interpretation (53). The example concerns a story Jourdan tells of her key participant Jonathan Fifi'i, in order to reveal something of the political habitus and social sensibilities of the bigmen (local moral authorities) of the Solomon Islands' in-land villages.

This story comes near the end of Jourdan's extensive first chapter on the social history and geography of the Islands; this being the case, its intimate tone can nonetheless hardly be separated from the "positive knowledge" which is the primary concern of its surrounding text, and which Fassin identifies as a critical advantage (or at least distinguishing feature) of anthropological writing. I'll place the short story in its entirety below — you'll have to forgive me if I ask some extra reading of you with this one — and then I'll discuss first the orienting cultural concepts from earlier in the text which the passage finally illuminates and vivifies, and second the historical context (or vertical interpretation) that it both deepens and is deepened by.

> En juin 1989, Jonathan fut hospitalisé à l'hôpital d'Atoifi (petit hôpital de brousse situé en pays Kwaio) pour y subir une opération de la gorge. C'est là que je lui rendis visite et remarquai la vétusté des lieux, la saleté des draps que l'hôpital n'avait pas les moyens de changer souvent, la pauvre nourriture et le manque de confort général. Jonathan ne se plaignait pas : il bénéficiait d'une chambre pour lui seul et sa femme pouvait y dormir, veillant ainsi à ses besoins quotidiens. Après les salutations d'usage, je partis au petit magasin de l'hôpital et y achetai une paire de draps, une nouvelle moustiquaire, des savonnettes, du lait en poudre, du café soluble, du sucre, deux tasses et une cuvette pour ses ablutions. Ce n'était pas grand-chose, mais j'espérais ainsi améliorer le confort physique de cet homme au soir de sa vie. Jonathan était très content, et sa femme encore plus. Le lendemain, je quittai l'hôpital pour une virée en brousse et y revins 5 jours plus tard. Jonathan s'y trouvait seul, sa femme étant retournée au village pour quelques jours. Hormis une savonnette, le lait en poudre, le café soluble et une tasse, tout ce que j'avais offert à Jonathan avait disparu. Mon regard plein de questions non posées lui fit m'expliquer qu'il avait demandé à sa femme de porter le reste au village et de le distribuer à ceux de ses fidèles qui les lui avaient demandés. « Mais pourquoi ? Vous en avez plus besoin qu'eux », lui dis-je. « Parce qu'il le faut », répondit-il (19-20).

In this half-paragraph of text, Jourdan's ethnographic story brightly illustrates a number of key cultural concepts and historical contexts — previously discussed at length, yes, but only abstractly or at least somewhat generally — and shows us as readers how this vertical knowledge allows us to cross the intersubjective divide and get inside Jonathan's head much differently than how we might have otherwise. The knowledge and the story cross-pollinate.

In conceptual terms, Johnathan's generosity does double work: on the one hand, it exemplifies and thus proves the lived reality of the reciprocal gift politics and strong obligatory bonds of

Jourdan's account of bigman politics; at the same time, it deepens the richness with which we might understand the concepts, by showing how the intricate strategizing of this communitarian social structure forces / invites political actors to make serious and almost incredible sacrifices as a part of their effort to wield exchange-chains in order to stabilize collective and familial futures.

In contextual terms, this highly personal recollection — confined in its perspective to the dirty hospital room of a slowly-dying man — speaks to and with Jourdan's earlier description of Solomon Islands national and colonial history. Before he was introduced as an important ethnographic character, or even as a distant friend — indeed, even well before the text offered any explicit suggestion that its author had ever been to the Solomon Islands at all — Johnathan Fifi'i appeared simply as a relevant name to a noteworthy (if nothing more) political episode known as Maasina Rule. This, Jourdan explained, was an organic effort to reinvest in traditional forms of Islands political collectivity as colonial interest in the region began to wain. Still, it was strongly repressed, and we were told that its leaders spent a number of years in jail as the movement receded into secrecy and finally near-oblivion.

This story lets us imagine things in a new light: the unwavering importance of collectivity and community that was nominally the center of that movement is present here with obvious and intense spiritual weight. And again, at the same time, the history of Maasina Rule allows us to interpret the story of Johnathan's gift on a slightly deeper register: as readers, we have the opportunity to imagine this dirty room, and the possibility of thinking of others from within it, from the perspective of a man who spent nearly a decade in prison cells, quite probably thinking above all of *Maasina* (that is, of fraternity).

Alright, with that little detour back into Jourdan's text taken care of, I'll now try to do something of the same double work with respect to one of my own half-famous research participants.

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First in this style of ethnographic writing come the concepts and the context: some propositions about cultural form or practice, and a certain version of the historical conditions that support them. For my cultural concepts of life in scientific institutions (in this part of the world), I'll rely on Latour's account generalized from his experiences at the Salk Institute, and others in similar programs elsewhere, in *Laboratory Life*. For my historical and biographical context, I'll have to rely on Laurence's version of events, triangulated with some limited information from two other participants in the milieu, and then whatever histories of his life and of the Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry (DSTP) can be found as a matter of public record.

At the risk of repeating what I've already written for this class, it is Latour's argument that the history of science is to be best (though certainly not exclusively) interpreted as an ongoing and emerging process of constructing facts through whatever social and material means happen to be available — as opposed, for example, to a linear and predetermined process of producing 'True Knowledge'. This social construction of facts (for a hardened Latourian the adjective is in fact

redundant) takes the form of a continuous navigation and rearrangement of the networks necessary to support those facts. These heterogenous networks position material apparatuses like scientific laboratories and instruments in alliances with social agencies like universities, funds-granting councils, and public interest groups. One major purpose of these networks — speaking purely descriptively here — is to generate and accumulate credit for the facts, the instruments and scientists 'behind' them, and the account of things that they fit most convincingly into.

The relevant history of the DSTP goes something like this: in the 1950s, Eric Wittkower and Jacob Fried — two Jewish migrants to Montreal, one of them an early practitioner of the psychosomatic approach to contemporary biomedicine, and the other a cultural anthropologist — founded the division at McGill. It was the first named transcultural psychiatry department in the world, and one of the first institutional medical agencies to take anthropological insights with such a degree of seriousness. Of course, like the anthropology of its time, its operating assumptions were essentially colonial in nature, more or less holding that culture happened somewhere 'out there' beyond the rational scientific institutions, which might come to understand it as if from nowhere. Its radical claim was that biomedicine ought to profit from a deeper understanding of these peculiar differences between physicians at the center, and the migratory subjects who came to visit them with their ever-so-slightly unfamiliar problems.

This subfield thus emerges out of an anthropology of colonial encounters and a psychiatry rapidly transitioning from the psychoanalytic model towards a more materialistic approach to psychological health. In both cases, the transformations of these fields are driven by the new social (and clinical) imperatives that follow from the new forms of migration particular to the political and technological conditions of the twentieth century. Continued increase in global migration (in quantity, and arguably in complexity as well) has driven the disciplinary transitions within the field since its self-conscious academic inception. The ambiguous trajectory of the material approach to psychiatry in general has also shaped the destiny of this department. As, for example, the neuroscientific and genetic models of psychiatric science have failed to make good on their promises to deliver standard treatments for unwellness — failed, that is, to bear out their claims to social and financial credit — alternative or supplementary explanations, such as the cultural articulation of psychiatry, have increasingly been able to win over allies and proponents.

Under Kirmayer's directorship, the department shifted its focus from the colonial sciences of ethnopsychiatry to a more dispersed or decentralized clinical *savoir-faire* of community mental health in the contemporary global and multicultural context. This interest in the generation of a strong body of knowledge based on case studies and interdisciplinary analysis reflects in many ways a larger shift in much of mainstream biomedicine towards a concern for social determinants of health, the deconstruction of harmful power dynamics between doctor and patient, and (in Canada) a political imperative to develop good healthcare for immigrants. This new cultural psychiatry requires its own philosophical framework and ethical sensitivity — which moves outwards from a clinical encounter still rooted in biology and allopathy to an ecological interpretation of problems reaching towards systems thinking and critical theory.

So, how can we use our concepts and this historical context — our vertical perspective — to make sense of Laurence? How might his biography illuminate this larger scientific trajectory?

First, with the concepts, we can see Laurence's work to reorient the department from ethnopsychiatry to cultural psychiatry as a move to protect and augment departmental credit in the light of changing social conditions. Since, if Latour is correct, laboratory and institutional science is inextricably bound up with social and political desires and exigencies, then the changing social attitudes towards global culture, migration, and materialistic biomedicine mean that the landscape of opportunities and pressures for the DSTP must change as well — just as, fifty years earlier, shifting public attitudes towards psychoanalysis and the political crises of a post-war Europe opened the door for the old transcultural psychiatry to emerge into credibility. Laurence's daily work as the director — editing the journal, overseeing hiring, going to conferences, developing departmental priorities — consists in a subtle balance between sniffing out these shifts in the social winds, and trying to nudge our sensibilities in what he views to be the right direction through the careful construction of facts which attest to his version of reality.

So, if these concepts allow us to make sense to Laurence's professional life as a process of seeking and generating credit, what contexts might explain why he chose to align his interest with a wider social movement that, if not always explicitly, is essentially decolonial in nature? Maybe it's enough to just say that he was smart enough to get things right; maybe it would be more correct to say that the shifting sensitivities of contemporary science are responsible for his actions, and not at all *vice versa*. But it could be fun to speculate, anyways. Starting at the beginning, unlike Wittkower and Fried, who were emigrants from a destroyed Jewish Europe, Laurence was born into an already-established Montreal Jewish community. I don't know if his education was religious or secular — in Quebec, Jewish education has been publicly protected and funded since 1903 — but I can speak with some insight as to the general social and cultural sensibilities of this community. Cultural distinctness as a political question has long been very salient to Jewish people in Montreal (I'm not including the Hassidim here, who have their own priorities and concerns). We have had to undertake fraught negotiations with assimilation through the quiet revolution and alongside a provincially mandated interculturalism.

In the years following the Shoah, when Laurence was growing up in Montreal, the strong desire for financial independence and geosocial security (which have been essential concerns of the Jewish diaspora for at least ten centuries) were especially pronounced; this desire expressed itself in the form of an imperative to get educated and get into large public and economic institutions: hospitals, universities, courts, and chambers of commerce. At the same time, young Jewish people in the 60s and 70s reacted against this normative impulse and caught the wave of the mid-century countercultures: Leonard Cohen and Mordecai Richler are great local examples. Out of this context of intellectual and social tensions, Laurence went to McGill as a student of hard sciences and eventually medicine. Seminar classes with Margaret Lock planted his interest in anthropological inquiry; when he returned from his residency (in the countercultural and cybernetic Mecca of California in the late 70s), he found a shrunken department in need of new social relevance and philosophical vigour. So, there it is: a convergence of life and history.

Exercise Nine

For this exploration of the theme or question of difficult writing, I want to follow closely the example set by Brenda Chalfin in 'Infrastructural Intimacies', by considering the difficulties (and opportunities) presented by writing about waste. Only, I will introduce a slight shift in direction to this project, and take as my object of difficult writing the kind of human waste that traces out our other dirty contemporary infrastructures of consumption and emission: those of trash, garbage, or pollution. Chalfin's framework gives us a lot to go on here — like shit, our habits and material networks of trash are shameful; like the excremental infrastructures of Tema, the waste infrastructures of our part of the world are broadly dysfunctional.

The productive difference between these two difficult anthropologies of waste would be that, since excremental waste (and its infrastructures) are more closely linked to fundamental biological conditions, they do not need to be an object of critique *per se*; on the other hand, there are clear dangers in naturalizing the forms of waste connected to those other infrastructures of concealment, concentration, and expulsion. Shit *is* shameful but doesn't need to be; trash probably *isn't* experienced by most users of its infrastructures as shameful enough.

In this specific sense, whereas effective excremental infrastructures promote urban health and dignity, highly-effective or overly-convenient infrastructures of pollution might encourage forms of urban life which, in all the fullness of time, prove dangerous and destructive. Nonetheless, it should be fairly clear why Chalfin's arguments about the political vibrancy of the excremental could be a useful heuristic for those interested in interrogating the trajectory of their own garbage. In thinking through the complicated vitality of both of these kinds of substances — and the impressive lengths to which we all go in the effort to banish them far from public appearance — we might find footholds in conversations which are no less urgent for all of their difficulty.

Before going further into things, it will be necessary to think through what makes writing about the quotidian forms of pollution — in which we are all complicit, or of which we are all guilty — so peculiarly difficult. From where I stand, I think some of this difficulty comes from the structural paradox (psychologically speaking) of eco-grief. According to contemporary attachment theory, the fundamental accomplishment involved in the mourning process is the recognition that the object of grief no longer exists in the active libidinal economy or field. The grieved thing changes status: from something that could be held, touched, or somehow otherwise incorporated into the structure of the self into something that is now experienced as its absence.

If an awareness of the climate crisis leads to a sense of grief for an ecology that is no longer possible, then the contemporary psychological project — the libidinal situation into which the new generations are born — is to learn how to experience the world (something from which we are clearly still not separate, something of which we are permanently and actively only a part) as absence. Obviously it is difficult to write about this situation in a technical or structural sense (the feeling is hard to explain), and I'd argue that it is also difficult to write from within this situation in an ontological sense (the feeling is hard to feel).

This will be our first difficulty: the ecological mode of grief involves finding a way to get outside of the world, so as to experience it properly as an object of mourning, or as a loss for which we somehow share the responsibility.

In writing our way through ecological grief, we might find that the infrastructures of waste offer us something sturdy enough to hold on to as we shift from mourning to moving on; in other words, the very material habits and networks that seem to have compromised the integrity of the environment are what will trace out the paths that we'll have to follow if we want to get back (in)to the world. And on this journey back, Chalfin's theoretical resources will be very useful.

So, what are some of the lessons we can take from her ethnography of waste? We can begin with the first words of her introduction: "With all due respect…"

I think respect will have to be the key affective mode of dirty anthropology. Ethnographers of the shitty are responsible for articulating the worthiness and dignity of all those involved in keeping these broken infrastructures moving, and must reserve a special place for those forward-thinking individuals and communities that find ways to intervene creatively in the movement of trash. Sanitation workers, recycling-plant operators, waste-management experts; the can people, the alternatively housed with their architectures of refuse and refusal, the 'wasted' street freaks who wrap themselves in rags and plastic — these inheritors of the world to come, far out ahead of the curve, will all get their flowers in the critical cultural study of garbage and its futures.

Doesn't their sacrifice merit some recognition? It cannot be comfortable for them…

It is in these emergent imaginations of 'the otherwise' of life amidst the trash that we will discover the techniques and aesthetics necessary to carry out Donna Haraway's imperative, and 'stay with the trouble'. Respect, then, might be the antidote to the strong cultural sense of shame that keeps our trash black-bagged and underrepresented in the new parliaments of things. Bringing a respect for the embodied skills of the scavengers, the dirty-handed, and the street engineers into the anthropological fold will then indeed involve picking up Latourian and Arendtian tools. Latour, for his part, will help us listen to the voices of the underutilized and overproduced objects that enter the infrastructures of waste far too early; Arendt, the perpetual optimist, will contribute the ability to 'think without a banister' and read 'crisis as opportunity'.

We are in bad times with trash, and it will definitely get worse. As the world becomes tinged with a pervasive microplastic hue, cities become remapped with increasingly noticeable networks of encampments, and the people within those camps become dangerously conflated with the litter they leave behind, this new style of attentive optimism will probably emerge as a critical moral imperative. It is likely that we will have to turn to the infrastructures of trash and begin treating them as new kinds of inscription devices, which point us to answers by tracing out situations of gross excess. Wherever the mounting pressure and stress of our dirty habits causes these fragile systems of landfill and incineration to collapse, we will have our new field sites.

Writing now, as we wait for the breakdown, is still difficult. But we better get to work anyways, and start learning how to sift through these massive and ever-growing archives of trash, in order to follow the rivers of waste back to their sources. Luckily, there are already some heroes of this new speculative cartography who might show us the way: Zoe Lucas, who for decades has meticulously catalogued the flow of trash over Sable Island; my friend Keith, who for twenty years has lived in the field like litter beneath the Don Valley Parkway; and theorists like Chalfin, Arendt, and Latour, who endeavour to make their heroics make sense at last.

Note.
This piece is an example of a style I've been trying to develop throughout this dossier of exercises that I've come to think of 'letting the idea do the talking'. What I mean by this is that I'm not sure if I can fully agree with or stand behind everything I've written, in this piece and elsewhere for this course. What I've tried to do is to approach these questions from a specific mood and just see what there is to say along that line of inquiry.

Part of what I really admire about the 'freaks' I describe in this piece is their commitment to pursue ways of life at really extreme angles. One thing I see in their styles of living is a very brave effort to 'walk away from Omelas' and see if there is anything for us out there beyond what seems to make sense (and yet is also clearly not working). In doing this they are like countercultural scouts or probes, giving us something against which to make sense of our strange normal, exploring radically different pathways and allowing us to evaluate their findings.

I would like to dedicate my writing in this class to these people, and to their spirit of performative research, in the hope that my own research can somehow promote the value we collectively place on supporting and encouraging these speculative efforts towards biodiversity.